

6.4.5. Conflict—Goal #5:
Process Fights and Regrettable Incidents.

The couple will be able to process fights and regrettable incidents using The Aftermath Of A Fight Or Regrettable Incident exercise (see 6-58).

Processing Arguments.

By using the *Aftermath of a Fight* as an aid for couples, you help the partners to process a fight or regrettable incident they've just had. After each partner describes the anatomy of the fight, the exercise focuses on the following:

I felt. What was each person feeling? What are the unstated "I statements"? You can help people to identify these by using the "I feel" checklist, or teaching them focusing if the Aftermath Questionnaire feelings list isn't adequate for them.

Each partner describes his or her own subjective reality. The couple needs to subscribe to the notion that there are always two valid subjective realities. So an important goal for you is first getting both people to realize that there are always at least two valid ways of seeing any interaction. Then you help each partner to describe the following: What were each person's perceptions and needs in this situation? How did they express their needs? Partners take turns being speaker or listener. The speaker presents their point of view or subjective reality about what happened, while the listener just listens. Then they trade roles. You help the partners to transform negative attributions of their partner into statements about their positive needs; this is the recipe for their success. You can help the partners to describe their needs by asking questions like "What did you wish for?" "What would have been ideal?" "What did you hope for?" "If you could have waved a magic wand and everything would have been perfect suddenly, what would that have looked like?"

Summarizing & validating two subjective realities.

After one partner is the speaker, the listener then summarizes what their partner just said. You should make sure that the speaker gently makes corrections if the listener didn't reflect the speaker's most salient points. You may also need to use a Dan Wile

The admitting mode is one in which they can start seeing their responsibility in the problem and the argument. The *Aftermath of a Fight* Questionnaire helps here. Also, Video-tape playback is useful for moving many couples from attack-defend to admitting modes.

Moving to collaborative mode is a greater challenge. It is easier to do after the fight than during it, partly due to DPA. Soothing is very important in partners moving themselves to collaborative mode, as are the earlier steps of the Sound Relationship House, those that are related to Negative Sentiment Override.

The next step is to get the couple to be able to have a dialogue about this issue. In this dialogue, they actually use how they feel about the issue as a way of indexing the first three levels of the Sound Relationship House. For example, suppose a partner tends to get angry with her partner because she thinks he is paying too much attention to the children. After many *Aftermath of a Fight* conversations, she eventually learns that this issue is reminiscent of her conflicts with her sister for her parents' attention. The problem doesn't go away, but it becomes an index of her not asking for what she needs from her partner. She begins to have more insight into the issue.

Many fights and regrettable incidents are about failures of emotional connection, too, like having turned away from or against bids. Processing these regrettable incidents not only helps with conflict management—it also aids in building the friendship system.

STEP 1

Feelings: Share how you felt. Do not say why you felt that way. Avoid commenting on your partner's feelings.

I felt...

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. defensive | 19. out of control | 38. my opinions didn't even matter |
| 2. not listened to | 20. frustrated | 39. there was a lot of give and take |
| 3. feelings got hurt | 21. righteously indignant | 40. I had no feelings at all |
| 4. totally flooded | 22. morally justified | 41. I had no idea what I was feeling |
| 5. angry | 23. unfairly picked on | 42. lonely |
| 6. sad | 24. unappreciated | 43. alienated |
| 7. unloved | 25. disliked | 44. ashamed |
| 8. misunderstood | 26. unattractive | 45. guilty |
| 9. criticized | 27. stupid | 46. culpable |
| 10. took a complaint personally | 28. morally outraged | 47. abandoned |
| 11. like you didn't even like me | 29. taken for granted | 48. disloyal |
| 12. not cared about | 30. like leaving | 49. exhausted |
| 13. worried | 31. like staying and talking this through | 50. foolish |
| 14. afraid | 32. I was overwhelmed with emotion | 51. overwhelmed |
| 15. unsafe | 33. not calm | 52. remorseful |
| 16. tense | 34. stubborn | 53. shocked |
| 17. I was right and you were wrong | 35. powerless | 54. tired |
| 18. both of us were partly right | 36. I had no influence | |
| | 37. I wanted to win this one | |

STEP 2

Realities: Describe your "reality." Take turns. Summarize and validate at least a part of your partner's reality.

Subjective Reality and Validation

- Take turns describing your perceptions, your own reality of what happened during the regrettable incident. Describe yourself and your perception. Don't describe your partner. Avoid attack and blame. Talk about what you might have needed from your partner. Describe your perceptions like a reporter, giving an objective blow-by-blow description. Say "I heard you saying," rather than "You said."
- Summarize and then validate your partner's reality by saying something like, "It makes sense to me how you saw this and what your perceptions and needs were. I get it." Use empathy by saying something like, "I can see why this upset you." Validation doesn't mean you agree, but that you can understand even a part of your partner's experience of the incident.
- Do both partners feel understood? If yes, move on. If no, ask, "What do I need to know to understand your perspective better?" After summarizing and validating, ask your partner, "Did I get it?" and "Is there anything else?"

What set me up (continued):

8. I'd been turning away more.
9. I'd been getting easily upset.
10. I'd been depressed lately.
11. I'd had a chip on my shoulder lately.
12. I'd not been very affectionate.
13. I'd not made time for good things between us.
14. I'd not been a very good listener lately.
15. I'd not asked for what I needed.
16. I'd been feeling a bit like a martyr.
17. I'd needed to be alone.
18. I'd not wanted to take care of anybody.
19. I'd been very preoccupied.
20. I hadn't felt very much confidence in myself.
21. I'd been running on empty.

2. Specifically what do you regret, and specifically, what was your contribution to this regrettable incident or fight?**3. What do you wish to apologize for?**

(Read aloud) I'm sorry that:

1. I over-reacted.
2. I was really grumpy.
3. I was defensive.
4. I was so negative.
5. I attacked you.
6. I didn't listen to you.
7. I wasn't respectful.
8. I was unreasonable.
9. Other:

**4. If you accept your partner's apology, say so.
If not, say what you still need.**